

the epidemic poisons, or modifications in the system of persons exposed to the poisons.

A discussion followed, in which Dr. Greenhow, Dr. Camps, Mr. Hunt, Dr. Delima, Dr. Jas. Bird, and Dr. McWilliam, took part.

Editor's Letter Box.

ARSENIC AS A REMEDY FOR THE BITE OF THE TSETSE, ETC.

LETTER FROM JAMES BRAID, ESQ.

SIR,—Permit me to return you my best thanks for the promptitude with which you brought my suggestions under the notice of Dr. Livingstone, of trying small doses of arsenic in the treatment of oxen bitten by the *tsetse*. I was much gratified to observe, by your editorial postscript appended to my letter, that the doctor had promised, if possible, to put my suggestion to the test of experiment during his forthcoming expedition into South Africa, because the experiment is certain to be fairly made under the superintendence of such a liberal and enlightened philosopher as Dr. Livingstone.

I observe that the last number of your JOURNAL contains a letter from Mr. Kesteven, criticising my communication above referred to, both as regards the alleged facts recorded by Dr. Honigberger, as well as the inferences which I had deduced therefrom. I consider Mr. Kesteven, and every one else, has an undoubted right to demur to any inferences drawn by me from narratives which I had duly set forth as the premises for said deductions. Nothing is more common, or perhaps more natural, than that different minds should draw different inferences from the same premises: nor is it unnatural that a gentleman like Mr. Kesteven, who, in 1856, so successfully refuted the extravagant romances put forth about the alleged wholesale arsenic-eaters of Styria, should be ready for a tilt with any one whom he alleged was for setting up like pretensions regarding the inhabitants of Hindostan or any other part of the globe! It was by no means just in Mr. Kesteven, however, to have imputed to me any such extravagant and implicit credulity as this, which is evidently implied in his letter, and especially in the following expression: "I would ask Mr. Braid upon what he grounds his belief of arsenic-eating?" Assuredly there is no expression in my letter to warrant the inference that I entertained any such extravagant and romantic notions as that men and women could swallow daily, and for lengthened periods of time, large quantities of such a deadly poison as arsenic, not only with impunity, but with positive advantage to their health and personal appearance.

This much, however, I did believe, and still do believe, to be not only possible, but highly probable; viz., that the cunning faqueer had ascertained that, by taking small doses of arsenic for a few days before each occasion on which he was to exhibit his feats, he could so impregnate his blood with the antiseptic properties of the arsenic as would neutralise the naturally deadly septic properties of the poison of the serpents by which he was to be bitten, and thus enable him to escape unscathed from the venom of the reptiles, without having taken so much arsenic as to produce permanently injurious effects upon his constitution. It must be obvious to every one that this is a very different affair from my supposing the faqueer, or any one else, was capable of swallowing large and poisonous doses of arsenic daily for a long period of time, or for a lifetime: and, without positive and carefully conducted experiments to prove the contrary, I maintain that I am as well entitled to believe that my supposition in this respect is correct, as Mr. Kesteven, or any one else, is to form a contrary opinion, on merely theoretical grounds.

I readily admit, however, that, had I been in Dr. Honigberger's position, I certainly should have put the faqueer through a much more severe ordeal in proof of his alleged powers than the doctor did. I should have endeavoured to prove it by being an eye-witness as to the quantities taken at each dose, the frequency of their administration, and how much in all was required to be taken preparatory to subjecting himself to be bitten with impunity by the reptiles. I would also have taken special care to ascertain, for certain, that the reptiles used were really poisonous serpents, whose poison-fangs and apparatus remained entire. That Dr. Honigberger did not take all these precautions, I can only attribute to the

alarm which he experienced when the faqueer had nearly died on the occasion referred to, and the serious consequences which might have ensued in such case from his being a Brahmin. Moreover, Dr. Honigberger held a very responsible government appointment at Lahore, under Shere Sing, as he had done for many years previously under his father, Runjeet Sing; and he might fear that taking too prominent a part in such an inquiry might prove prejudicial to his interests in his official capacity.

I am too well aware from history, and the oral communications which I have had from those who have long resided in India, of the falsehood, deceit, and trickery of the Bengalee, and especially of the faqueers, not to be alive to many of their devices for making people believe that they can charm venomous serpents, and render them harmless by some secret spell; or that they may pretend to permit themselves to be bitten with impunity by poisonous reptiles through the efficacy of some nostrum, when all the while the real charm consisted in a legerdemain trick of substituting a harmless for an alleged poisonous reptile, or by one really poisonous by nature, but rendered harmless by the extraction of its fangs and poison-apparatus, which, I know, is much practised by the so-called snake-charmers in India. Mr. Kesteven seems to think that some such trickery as this was the real secret of this faqueer's general immunity from harm, and that the real cause of the disastrous and all but fatal effects which took place on the occasion referred to was not the want of his prophylactic doses of arsenic, but because he was watched so narrowly by Dr. Honigberger that he had not the opportunity of selecting a harmless reptile, as he generally did. Mr. Kesteven must have read my letter very carelessly, otherwise he would have perceived that the facts of the case prove quite the contrary; for, when the faqueer was bitten by a serpent when "under the eye of Dr. Honigberger," and when he had no opportunity of selecting a harmless reptile, and when no harm was manifested in the faqueer by the infliction, there was nevertheless the most indubitable proof afforded that it was a venomous serpent—from this fact, that a fowl bitten by the same serpent immediately after died as the result of the poison-wounds. Again, the faqueer was not under the eye of Dr. Honigberger when the all but fatal injury occurred to him. On this occasion he was going from the powder-mills to Dr. Honigberger's house, when, meeting with a friend, he tried the experiment in his presence, by way of bravado, and consequently, when he had every opportunity for making a good selection. Nevertheless, the alarming results ensued, of which Dr. Honigberger knew nothing until the faqueer was taken to his house in an apparently dying state. Mr. Kesteven's surmises, therefore, are obviously quite at fault in both these instances.

Regarding the faqueer's excuse for the alarming consequences which ensued when he was bitten after he had been confined in the powder-mill—namely, that it was in consequence of his having been deprived of his usual quantity of arsenic during his confinement—Mr. Kesteven puts forth the following extraordinary argument in refutation of the faqueer's veracity: "This, it may be noted, is inconsistent with what is usually given as a prominent fact in arsenic-eating; viz., that to discontinue the practice is certain death." Now, if such really was a fact, then there might have been a twofold cause for the alarming symptoms on this occasion by withholding the arsenic—first, according to the faqueer's theory, precisely what did happen; but, secondly, according to the Styrian "prominent fact", he ought to have died outright at once, even without any poison from the fangs of the reptile. But, if the stories about the wholesale arsenic-eaters of Styria were satisfactorily proved by Mr. Kesteven's inquiries to be a mere fable or extravagant romance (which, I believe, was accomplished by him), so also must the tale necessarily have been which set forth that "to discontinue the practice was certain death"; for how could they discontinue a practice which had never existed? Moreover, science is quite adequate to prove the folly of such gratuitous assumptions; for every medical man of experience knows well that, however distressing may be the symptoms resulting from the sudden withdrawal of the non-cumulative stimuli, such as wine, spirits, opium, etc., whenever those of a cumulative nature, such as arsenic, digitalis, etc., have indicated by constitutional symptoms that we have reached their full medicinal influence and point of safety, the only safe course for the patient consists in their instant abandonment, for a time at least.

Perhaps I am quite as cautious regarding giving credence to extraordinary marvels in science and medical practice, without careful investigation, as most members of my profession; but

it did appear to me that, under the circumstances, I was warranted in throwing out the suggestion of trying small doses of arsenic as a probable remedy in the universally fatal and miserable disease which occurs in oxen bitten by the *tsetse*; and, however captiously my suggestion may be received by those possessed of less liberal minds, I am glad, at all events, that it has been favourably received and considered worthy of a trial by such a distinguished individual as Dr. Livingstone.

In conclusion, I would beg leave to remark, whilst danger may arise from too easy credulity and hasty generalisation in carrying out theoretical and practical medicine, still, on the other hand, without some degree of speculation and experimental investigation, we can never hope to make any great or rapid improvements in medical science and practice; and, consequently, I hold that the two opposite extremes of headlong enthusiasm, and uninquiring, unreasoning, dogmatic scepticism, are equally inimical to real progress and improvement in medicine, as in every other branch of art, science, and philosophy.

I am, sir, etc., JAMES BRAID.

Rylaw House, Oxford Street, Manchester, March 1858.

ARSENIC AS A REMEDY FOR THE BITE OF THE TSETSE.

LETTER FROM GEORGE W. BALFOUR, M.D.

SIR,—Without at all wishing to dispute or call in question the truth of Dr. Livingstone's observations respecting the *tsetse*, there is yet something so inexplicable and incongruous in the fact of its bite being alleged to be perfectly harmless to man, wild animals, and sucking calves, and only fatal to weaned and full grown domestic animals (and that, if I remember right, with the symptoms of a slow consuming fever), that, coupled with the known unhealthiness of the climate, would almost make one desire a more extended and perfect series of observations before accepting the conclusion that the bite, and not the climate, is the cause of these singular phenomena. And this all the more, as I am not aware that the nursing young of any animal are subject to those virulent remittent and intermittent fevers which prevail in certain unhealthy regions of the globe; while, of course, the wild animals of the district must be proof, by acclimatisation or otherwise, against these unhealthy influences; otherwise they would soon cease to exist. In man and in animals, the symptoms must vary somewhat; but should both arise from the influence of climate, and the *tsetse* bite prove a mere coincidence, it will be, of course, a very substantial reason for employing arsenic in their treatment, as suggested by Mr. Braid. I would, however, be inclined to advise larger doses, not less than gr. x or ℥i, to be given in solution as an arsenite of potass; by which means you know the exact dose, and ascertain that the animal has got it all.

As to arsenic being an antidote to any animal poison, whether snake or *tsetse*, the idea is simply incredible. I have little doubt that the Indians possess powerful antidotes, sufficient, at least, very much to modify if not altogether to prevent the effects of the bite of any of the less virulent snakes. In a letter which I recently had from South Africa, my informant mentions that a man, to all appearance dying from snake-bite, recovered, after receiving the native antidote, so as to be at once able to stand and be taken home. The antidote used was a herbal decoction; and there are many such herbs in the Hindoo pharmacology.

Dr. Honigberger's book is full of examples of his credulity. With other instances, he mentions having met *en route* from Cabul to Bokhara "a physician and horsedealer, who was said to consume daily one drachm of arsenic, and who had continued the practice since childhood." This tale, Dr. Honigberger accepts without a shadow of proof; although, being a homœopathist, he might have known that this dietetic use of arsenic was wholly opposed to the principles on which he professed to act. I do not see that his story of the wonderful faquer rests on any better foundation; and I may add, that the result of various inquiries into the alleged use of arsenic in Central Asia has been that the natives are much more prone to give arsenic to their neighbours than to take it themselves.

Independent of the medico-legal bearings of this arsenic-eating tale (which have been but too strikingly illustrated by recent cases), it is fraught with danger to the heedless public. Already I have had one case of accidental (?) poisoning by arsenic; and I know of another; both in young women, fellow servants, who had been using arsenic to improve their personal appearance. The poisoning in my case only went the length of producing an obstinate eczema: the other case was more

serious. I have little doubt that many such cases have occurred; and I hold that every one, more especially a medical man, who heedlessly gives currency to the idea of arsenic-eating, shares the responsibility of having occasioned them.

It might help to counteract the influence of the romance of poison-eating were the public aware that, apart from dogmatic assertion, the only foundation for it is the well known result of chronic arsenical poisoning (*Bergsucht*), to which the cobalt-miners are subject. It begins with conjunctivitis, sparkling eyes and anasarca, simulating increased fat; ending, alas, with a hairless, hidebound skeleton, slowly sinking to the tomb. (Scheffer, *Gesundheit der Bergleute*.)

I am, etc., GEORGE W. BALFOUR.

Westfield, Cramond, N.B., March 3rd, 1858.

MEDICAL REFORM.

LETTER FROM A. STOKES, M.D.

SIR,—What has become of Medical Reform, or rather, what has become of it in the pages of the *BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL*?

Did the note from the Hon. Mr. Cowper, received by our respected President on the breakfast morning at Nottingham, appointing—unprecedented honour!—an interview at Whitehall, entomb it? Since the receipt of that note, in July last, the *JOURNAL* has been nearly if not quite silent—as per agreement between the Reform Committee and Mr. Cowper—on this great question. Surely, after a struggle of some thirty years, the matter is not to be shelved because a Honourable writes half a dozen lines to a learned Baronet.

The Hon. Mr. Cowper is now out of place; it is, therefore, to be hoped that, instead of seeking to interest some member of the Government in the to them distasteful matter of Medical Reform, Mr. Headlam will again bring in his Bill, which, backed by the influence and agitation of the profession, in the shape of meetings, numerous petitions, and personal explanations with members of Parliament, will no doubt be carried by a large majority (147), as it was last session.

If the profession wait until Government are at leisure, and until no matter of pressing public interest is before the House, another thirty years will pass away, and Medical Reform be then, as now, a myth.

Hoping immediately to hear the note of preparation,

I am, etc., ALEX. STOKES.

1, Rodney Street, Liverpool, March 9, 1858.

[Nothing has been said about medical reform, simply because there has been nothing which could with propriety form the subject of public comment. The late President of the Board of Health had, we have been informed, given his attention to the framing of a Bill, which, had the late Ministry continued in office, would no doubt have soon been laid before the House. By recent events, the prospects of medical reform are for a time obscured; but we do not think it would be judicious to attempt to break through the obscurity by premature speculations or announcements. EDITOR.]

Medical News.

BIRTHS, MARRIAGES, DEATHS, AND APPOINTMENTS.

In these lists, an asterisk is prefixed to the names of Members of the Association.

BIRTHS.

- BEAMAN. On March 7th, at 3, Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, the wife of George Hulme Beaman, Esq., Surgeon, of a son.
- DENNY. On March 7th, at Cato Lodge, West Brompton, the wife of John Denny, Esq., Surgeon, of a daughter.
- FRASER. On March 2nd, at Bramshaw Parsonage, near Lyndhurst, the wife of John Fraser, M.D., Rifle Brigade, of a daughter.
- HILL. On March 2nd, at Osborne Villa, Lower Norwood, the wife of Ninian Hill, M.D., of a daughter.
- MACKENZIE. On March 8th, at 1, Oakfield Terrace, Hillhead, Glasgow, the wife of William Mackenzie, M.D., of a son.
- SMITH. On March 6th, at Winchester, the wife of Dr. Smith, Staff-Surgeon Rifle Depot Battalion, of a son.